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Oh, Susannah!

The Portland entertainer is throwing a holiday party, and you're invited

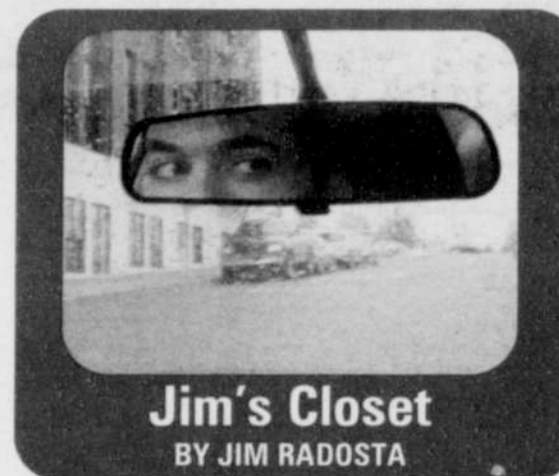
It's official: Susannah Mars is an Honorary Gay. The actress/singer earned the esteemed title after years of research. She played lesbians in *One* and *Falsettos* and the ex-wife of a gay man in *Theater District*. As a child actress growing up in Los Angeles, she even scored a brief one-line role in 1976's *Freaky Friday* with Jodie Foster. (Queer-friendly résumés run in the family: Her father, Kenneth, played deranged ex-Nazi Franz Liebkind in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*.)

She also has tons of gay friends, many of whom will be joining her for the cabaret *Mars on Life*. (See sidebar.) The family-friendly production covers a multitude of holiday traditions, incorporating music, comedy and audience interaction—including a nightly giveaway of gift certificates for theater and dance tickets, clothes, dinners and more.

Mars, who worked as a third-grade teacher before returning to acting in her mid-20s, lives in Gresham with her husband, chiropractor Gary Johnson, and their daughters, 13-year-old Kate and 7-year-old Olivia.

Jim Radosta: For somebody who has never seen your cabaret, how would you describe it to them?

Susannah Mars: Well, I like to take musical theater work and put it into new context. Sometimes I'll do real traditional music that I just love for the sense of the music itself...and then sometimes I'll take music that I'll string together into a set that I think is kind of a fun grouping.



In the holiday show I do a set called "I Want It" [featuring] "Great Big Stuff" from *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, "I Want It Now" from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and "I Want It All" from *Baby*. Those are all songs about wanting more and more and more, which I think speaks to the holidays and how people are a little nutty with the wanting. [Laughs]

JR: Care to share any holiday memories?

SM: I remember my favorite Christmas gift was getting a Hostess Buffet—which dates me, but oh well. [Laughs] It had the candelabra and the little candles and it had the little serving tongs and the plates. I thought it was the most beautiful thing ever. It was white plastic with this gold gilding. It was a buffet, like you'd have in your dining room, but mini for a kid! I just thought it was the living end. I remember my parents saying later how they had bent over backwards to find that thing, because it was the hit of the year. 10

Artists Repertory Theatre presents *MARS ON LIFE: THE HOLIDAY EDITION* Dec. 6 to 31 at 1516 S.W. Alder St. Tickets are \$35 from 503-241-1278.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.



The Guest List

Mars will be joined each night by special guests showing off their unique talents. Among the all-star lineup are some of Portland's gay luminaries:

• **Holcombe Waller (Dec. 7):** The neo-folkie met Mars while working on the musical *One*. "He's smart, and a politically aware person, and kind, besides being a fantastic musician. He's an all-around wonderful man."

• **Chris Coleman (Dec. 9):** Mars starred in the musical *A New Brain* when he joined Portland Center Stage as artistic director. "I just find him very inspiring in his love of musical theater and really like to be around him."

• **Jon Kretzu (Dec. 10):** Artists Rep's associate artistic director worked with Mars in *Guys and Dolls*, *Dinner with Friends*, *Theater District* and *Chaps*. "We holiday together a lot. He's just dear, inspiring, knowledgeable—oh my gosh, his knowl-

edge of theater and music is incredible—plus he's a wonderful pianist."

• **Rick Lewis (Dec. 14):** The musical director portrayed Mars' husband in a Seattle production of *Falsettos*. "He's an amazing pianist, a brilliant arranger and composer and has written wonderful shows, and he's a delight to work with."

• **Eric Skinner (Dec. 23):** The BodyVox dancer, who has choreographed a piece for the cabaret set to the music of Irving Berlin, worked with Mars in *Bat Boy*. "I'm a very hard worker but I'm not a great dancer, but I try really hard. Eric appreciated that about me, and that's why I like him!"

• **Marc Acito (Dec. 28):** Mars got to know the humorist (and former *Just Out* columnist) while listening to a recording of his book, *How I Paid for College*, during a commute to Ashland. "I felt like we were best friends...in the car together for 20 hours. He is so delightful and funny and articulate."